

VZCZCXRO2796  
RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHGI RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN  
DE RUEH KI #0530 1590813  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 080813Z JUN 09  
FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9686  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1261  
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE  
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE  
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS KINSHASA 000530

SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE

E.O.12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CG](#)  
SUBJECT: EMBASSY KINSHASA MAKES THE MOST OF PRESIDENT OBAMA'S CAIRO ADDRESS  
SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

REF: STATE 055334

¶1. Summary: Embassy Kinshasa hosted three viewings of President Obama's Cairo speech on June 4 and 5, reaching a direct audience of 80 journalists, opinion leaders (Muslim and non-Muslim), and Muslim women, as well as promoting the speech through local contacts, the Embassy website, Facebook pages, and other venues. The speech was seen as the beginning of a dialogue, and the Congolese press and public are eager to continue the discussion. End summary.

¶2. On Tuesday June 4, Embassy Kinshasa held two events for local journalists and opinion leaders to watch and discuss President Obama's speech. More than thirty journalists watched a live broadcast of the speech (simultaneously translated into French by France 24 news channel) in the PD auditorium. Officers in attendance were Political Counselor Phil Nelson, PAO Katya Thomas and APAO Stephen Weeks. The journalists listened attentively to the President's speech, and there was even applause at the end. During the Q&A session that followed, the journalists both expressed their appreciation of the speech, and wondered what direct impact any change in relations between the U.S. and the Muslim world might have on the DRC. As a result of this session, the President's address received wide media coverage in the DRC.

¶3. One female Muslim journalist said at the press event that while she appreciated the sentiments expressed in the President's speech, she hoped that Americans "would understand if [Muslims] are a bit skeptical" about what actions might follow these words. "The word that is truly in one's heart will find its place in the heart of another," she said. Another journalist admired the President's self confidence and the respect he commanded. "No one is going to throw a shoe at this president," the journalist remarked. Translated excerpts of the speech were made available to the journalists, as well as America.gov articles on the Obama Administration's policies in the Middle East and its relations with the Muslim world.

¶4. The second event was a re-showing of the recording of the President's speech in the PD auditorium. Twenty-five opinion leaders, many of them Muslim, were in attendance. After the speech, Deputy Chief of Mission Samuel Brock chaired a lively discussion that raised many important and deeply felt concerns shared by leaders of the Muslim community in the DRC. A male representative of a local Muslim group said, "This speech is very important for the Muslim community in the DRC as well as the world. We hope that you, the representatives of the United States government, can help make sure that our concerns are heard by the government here." Several participants expressed frustration that while Muslims constituted a significant minority population (approximately 10 percent of 65 million people) in the DRC, they felt ignored and disenfranchised. They saw President Obama's speech as an important first step, and hoped that the US Embassy can help communicate their concerns to the GDRC. "We want the US Government to act as intermediary between us and the DRC government," one Muslim leader said, "We are among the largest Muslim countries in Africa, and we offer our congratulations and encouragement to your President on this important step he has taken."

¶5. On June 5, a group of 25 Muslim women watched the speech at the American Cultural Center. They were also given official transcripts of the speech translated into French, as well as other related materials. During the speech itself, the audience visibly and audibly appreciated several quotations by President Obama from the Koran, as well as references to common values found in the major faiths. When he introduced the theme of women's rights, there was an audible buzz among the crowd, and several expressions of agreement and appreciation were audible through that portion of the speech.

¶6. After the speech, PAO Katya Thomas moderated a discussion with the Muslim women, stressing that she was there to listen. The audience appreciated being given the opportunity to react to the speech. Every person in turn expressed their admiration for the values expressed in the speech, and wanted to know what concrete results might come out of it. "Our Constitution is the Koran," one woman said, "and the extremists are misusing it. If the word of God is respected, we will have peace." The same women also stressed the importance of education and literacy: "The angel Gabriel said, 'Read. Read. Read.' If we don't have access to education, we have nothing, we can't even read the Koran." The woman asked for the USG to help develop education and health programs in the DRC.

¶7. Another woman pointed out how Muslims themselves are victims of terrorism, and asked the USG to help the Muslim community to identify extremists, which she called "the bad fruit that stain the image of Islam." She also expressed the hope that one day President Obama and the First Lady would come visit DRC, and that "Congolese Muslims would be among the first to greet them."

¶8. Even with the overall extremely positive response, several participants questioned what kind of real progress might be reasonably expected. One woman wondered how President Obama might be able to change "negative stereotypes that American people have of Muslims." Another said, "He talked about the three great religions, but what is the strategy to end the conflict?" Finally, one woman expressed the need for a proper census of Congolese Muslims, so that "we would be able to know the extent of our own community." Estimates of Congolese Muslims range from 6 to 10 million, out of a population of approximately 65 million.

¶9. Comment: Journalists, opinion leaders and Muslim women all saw President Obama's speech not as the final word, but as the beginning of a conversation, in which they felt both the desire to be heard, and the expectation that they would be listened to. The DRC has one of the largest Muslim populations in Sub-Saharan Africa, yet Muslims are conspicuously absent in national politics. The fact that most Congolese Muslims live in the eastern region of the country, many of them in conflict zones, only makes their political integration more vital to peace, stability and development in the GDRC. End comment.

GARVELINK